INTERVIEWEE: ED PEARL

INTERVIEWER: Victor Cohen

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EP: There was another book that was lost in the fire. That was the book that covered the first four years, or five years, of the Ash Grove.

VC: So this starts right in '63.

EP: Yeah. _____ in '58, in July, and it was at the – March or something.

VC: Yeah, five-seven?

EP: Oh, May. Okay. So just almost five years. And the first five years is when people like Odetta – I mean, Odetta comes up a couple times in that book. But Bud and Travis or the Limelighters were actually number one in the country with their first album, which was recorded at the Ash Grove, and debuted it. I hired Lou Gottleib, the person who formed the Limelighters, the bass player/comic, as a piano playing, bass playing comic. He asked me whether he could use the Ash Grove to – he had this idea he wanted to organize a group. I had originally seen him when he was part of the Golden State Trio, or something like that, up in San Francisco years earlier. He's very funny. Anyway, but at that point, they were the Gateway Singers. San Francisco being the gateway. They were the same setup as the Weavers, with three men and a girl singer. Elmerlee Thomas was her name.

VC: Emily Thomas?

EP: Elmerlee. An African American, really good singer. She was _____ Gilbert. So when he came down here, he had the same idea. The interesting thing about that is he did audition women, and so on, but after he got Glen Yarborough, with him and Alex and Glen, he stopped looking, because Glen had the voice that would be the singular voice. And Alex was really good looking and a competent player. Glen was the voice, and Lou was the emcee, the funny, and a good bass player, the musician. He arranged everything.

It was very commercial. It was taking folk songs and using classical harmony, kind of – I mean, people like the Kingston Trio lucked out. They were the first ones to record "Tom Dooley," and had a huge hit. I mean, their arrangements are nothing. Nothing. It was the uniqueness of the sound and the subject matter, and it was nice and light. But Lou, having had a lot of classical training, was a real musician, and given the voices that they had – and he could sing bass, or baritone, really, a low baritone – and with Glen's glorious voice and Alex Hassilev's fine voice, they were very rich. But it was wonderful popular music. It had nothing to do with the sound from whence the songs came. Nothing. Nor was there – the stage didn't look very sophisticated, and they wore tuxedos, et cetera.

So I had a number of big things. I also relied heavily on people like Gail _____, a very beautiful Israeli. Gail _____ and the _____. They were a very big hit in Israel.

VC: So they would play at the Ash Grove?

EP: Yeah, regularly.

VC: So when they would play, they would be there for a week engagement?

EP: Yeah, at least.

VC: Who would come to the Israeli music?

EP: Oh, my God. Well, see, I come from the Zionist Movement. I don't know if I told you that.

VC: Right. Yeah, you said you had –

EP: Me and my brothers. But also my extended family are pretty well known in that area. My aunt and my cousins and their families went to the – I forget – the synagogue, it's a really big synagogue on La Cienega and Olympic. They lived within walking distance. Their synagogue was conservative, so they could walk. My sister volunteered to be the coordinator for groups, so she arranged group parties, and the first ones that were very accessible and easily accessible were the Jewish and Zionist groups.

But also where it was located, and the fact that I went to UCLA, and it was at UCLA and there were no alternate papers. The one alternate paper, the really important one was the *Los Angeles Free Press*. That didn't even start until 1965. I started it in 1958.

At that time, there was no great contradiction between being progressive and being Zionist, so I had peace people, Jewish and non-Jewish. They were really good. I mean, they were really good, like the Limelighters were really good, in that same way. Really good musicians, a simply gorgeous woman, much younger than Rona Gilbert ever was. You know what I'm saying? I mean, really, really pretty, with a great voice, and a great stage person. I mean, they could have – I'm sure

they were a hit in Paris. It was like that. And other people. A pantomimist and juggler, _____, I forget his last name, but another Israeli. And Rachel Hadas and other people from Israel came. Some of them stayed, some of them – you know. And they built an immediate fan base in Los Angeles. I was the only one doing it, along with Stan Wilson, who was as Josh White wannabe, and Bob Gibson, who was on the Arthur Godfrey show, a regular, and played a cleanup version of Pete Seeger, basically. All of that.

I was always looking for – now this opens, as you'll see once we start in on this thing. But I was searching around. Nothing happened until basically the New Lost City Ramblers and Lightening Hopkins showed up early on. Well, the Ramblers, first of all, Tom Paley alone in '59, and then the other two in 1960. Lightnin' in '60. So 1960 began the real – that's when I became aware that what I wanted to do all the time, from when I heard – I think I told you about listening to the Harry Smith collection and the traditional music that was played there.

VC: You mentioned it a little bit. How did you –

EP: I had my first living with a woman experience in 1956. She lived in Pasadena. She had a copy of the Harry Smith collection, and we spent a lot of time listening to it. I mean, it was this bunch of records, an album. I guess it was LP. Yeah, of course it was. It was an LP on folkways. And what he did was basically go around and collect old 78s from the twenties and thirties. And if he could get them, a little earlier. But basically, it was the twenties and thirties, on commercial records. But commercial records were different initially, in which they played – they were there and they had the wire recording for cutting grooves directly into recordings.

And they recorded great players and put it out. At a certain point, after the Carter family, more regional, much more melodious, broader sound, non-specific sound. I mean, a sound that was broader than Aunt Molly Jackson or Texas Gladden or any of the great – Roscoe Holcomb. The people who sang really within the tradition, using different scales, different endings, and using the nuances that they'd learned through their own generations of oral tradition development, before the outside world and the recording industry took it, and then began eliminating all these people.

So what Harry Smith, who was a filmmaker, did was simply collect all this stuff. And when I heard it, it was like a dream come true to me. I had always hoped that there would be a body of music that would actually sing the culture and lives and aspirations of working class people. I didn't use those words at that point, but that's what they were. Well, working people, people who were at the bottom who were scrambling, and survivors. And basically, the surviving cultures that were totally – not totally, but were relatively allowed by dint of their poverty and seclusion, and being pushed into the corners, being black or being hillbillies in the mountains of Appalachia. That's where they were. They had their religions and guns and their folklore. But they sang about work, and they sang about love and religion, and everything. And I always look for that, always have.

And sort of it was a development from first being attracted to Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson, people who sang about those people. I was now listening to those people directly. And then, starting in 1960, able to bring them and present them. I wasn't the only one, of course. The Ramblers were out there doing it, and

they came around playing replications, as best they could, of that sound. It was harder. There were very few black people that could play like Lighting Hopkins. None, actually. Stan Wilson tried. But Josh White himself had long given up his rural roots and had become a slick performer, for white people, basically, and so on. And Stan took Josh's already corrupted sound and tried to do what Josh did, but not as well.

But in any event, that's one of the reasons why Bernie talks about when he first heard Lightning. He just knew that that was the thing because there was such a gap between what we'd heard before and then Lightning coming in. The only one that came close that lived out here was Jesse Fuller.

VC: And you could tell immediately. Like once you heard Lightning, or once you heard the Harry Smith recordings, it was kind of instantaneous.

EP: I believe it was. I mean, it's been a long time, and it was a different life when I was nineteen and in love with an older woman, who had a real home. I mean, it was a rented home, but had a real home, et cetera. But yeah, it was simply fantastic to me. So I always wanted that, and people, some of them fairly well known, did not want me to listen to that, or to _____ in their search. One person – I mean, you don't have to say this, but Rolf Cahn, who had been married to Barbara Dane and who was a German – you know, heredity from Hitler. Rolf sang the blues and he played the blues and Flamenco. He told me there are no more folk. This is folk. What I'm doing is folk. I mean, he was very direct about it. And I was too young to argue with him. I knew he was wrong, but I just let it slide, always sort of hating him deep down for saying that, because he was wrong.

VC: Did you think he believed that, or do you think he just wanted to –

EP: I don't know, I don't care. He's the person actually who trained Odetta. He trained Odetta. Odetta was an opera singer. And Rolf is *the* person who talked Odetta into going into folk music, and he would guide her, blah, blah, blah. He liked being sort of, you know, a master, in the worst sense. I mean, he wasn't a tyrant at all, but he was – so I guess he did believe that, because – so he taught Odetta, introduced her to the material, and let her be operatic about it, and very showy, and so on.

So Odetta, I guess, in a way, was the closest thing to black music, and she was so good at it that she even – Bernice Reagon said that when she first heard Odetta that was one of the reasons she was – well, she was deeply moved. She thinks Odetta's a major influence in her life, simply because she could do all those sounds and go on stage and do that. I mean, Odetta was good in that way. Odetta was always a very studied professional, extremely studied.

I was friends with Odetta. I mean, I was part of – the person who opened Ash Grove, Guy Carawan, was a friend of Odetta's. And he was my guitar teacher and he recruited me, and others, and we formed the UCLA Folk Song Chorus. And we formed that in order so that we would be onstage behind Odetta and sing the chorus for which she –

VC: Really.

EP: Yeah. So I was one of those. And then I brought Odetta of course into the Ash Grove early on a number of times. And you know, with a big dressing room, and she would sort of take over everything. It was very _____ how to be exactly so,

and this and that. It was a very different feeling about the Ash Grove when she was there. So anyway, there was always a mixture of furs and jeans. Always.

VC: Just out of curiosity, was Odetta doing political material then, as well?

EP: Yeah, sort of. Yeah. I mean, she and her mother, _____, were on the outreach part of people in the party. Their position always was soft-sell. It was never – and it was always more involved, the Communist Party. It was always more – well, they were interested in the projection of what _____ always believed, that they did not accept black people or hillbillies on their own terms. So that gave me a lot of trouble.

VC: What do you mean – I mean, that they didn't take them on their own terms?

EP: Well, what I mean is that they – for example, when I began to – I remember to this day, I remember somebody who had been blacklisted, a really outstanding actor and comedian, Hershel Bernardi, who was furious that I had booked Mance Lipscomb instead of Martha Schlamme, the great Viennese, cultured, progressive – her son, Thomas Schlamme, is one of the producers of the *West Wing*. But Martha was also part of the – Martha, I don't think, ever belonged to anything. She was a Libertarian, really. And she loved younger guys. (laughs) That was fine with me. It was really funny, though, a couple of people she picked. It was really great. I loved them, because they were really oddballs. It was always more to her credit. Do you know what I'm saying?

VC: Right.

EP: She's a real artist, a real Viennese Libertarian artist. But she was for workers, and so on, but she had this great – she was a Viennese –

VC: Right. Chanteuse.

EP: Chanteuse, yeah, exactly. An actress. Wonderful actress on stage. She was just perfect. Her emotions, they were just – and she could move just perfectly. You could just see her in the *Merry Widow* or any of those things. And I, who came from the world of opera – by that I mean I loved opera right from the beginning, and I was a super – I was supposed to be getting – they never paid us until – you're supposed to wait for two hours after the opera was done. Anyway, I was a slave boy in *Aida*, I was a peasant in *La Boheme*. So what you get out of that is, if you loved opera, you got to be behind stage, and on stage sometimes. But I got to meet all my heroes.

VC: Where would the performances take place?

EP: Shrine Auditorium. That was one of them. And the Philharmonic, too, but mostly – the big operas were at the Shrine, and that was where you got the five dollars. Or were supposed to get it. Nobody ever got their five dollars. (laughs) Anyway, that's just an aside. And I'd seen them there and I'd been part of the whole scene for years. From the time I was in high school I was doing that.

So they had a certain – because they're cultured people themselves, and they had standards. Hershel said, "Some of these people can't even speak proper English." Again I just looked at him. It's like Rolf Cahn telling me that this isn't real folk. Horseshit. And yes, I'd rather talk to Doc Watson. What can I say? Anyway, so that brings us up to there. And the Ash Grove was – I was on the verge of transitioning from the folk movement to traditional music.

VC: Yeah, right. It says the first Ashley Watson, Price Howard, Peace Center – is that Roscoe Holcomb?

EP: Yeah.

VC: So that would be Sunday the twelfth, and then Tuesday the fourteenth it's Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys, Thursday the sixteenth Doc Watson.

EP: With Doc Watson, I guess. Yeah, because I wouldn't have taken Bill off stage, believe me. Bill and Doc. I introduced them. They had never met each other. I also introduced Lightning to Brownie and Sonny. They'd never met each other. And then they made a record about a week later. Because one was coming in – that was before. That was 1960 or '61. So it was before that.

VC: What's this SM Friends?

EP: Santa Monica what? Friends? Santa Monica Friends. That's the name of the group. Santa Monica Friends. Probably the Quakers. Twenty-four people came from the Santa Monica Quakers.

VC: And that was just a meeting?

EP: No. They were part of – they came and saw the show. My sister would book these groups, so they would get twenty seats, or thirty seats, whatever. For the shows.

VC: And then there's Willard and Greco?

EP: Yeah. Willard and Greco – you must have seen Fred Willard, or recognized the name. He's all over the movies. I mean, he's always a funny emcee, and all that.

VC: Yeah.

EP: Fred Willard and Vic Greco were this comedy duo. They were both very young. I don't know what happened to Vic Greco. But they were great. I hired them because they were funny, and the auditions were funny.

VC: So they did like a stand-up routine?

EP: Yeah. They were hilarious. I could do one for you, but it'd take like twenty minutes to do it. I love comedy, I always have. Really love comedy. I mean, good stuff.

VC: What's this, right there?

EP: Oh, _____. _____ was a mime.

VC: You had a mime?

EP: Yeah.

VC: How'd that go over?

EP: Fine. I had three or four of them.

VC: And what's this? The Spanish War, Gabby –

EP: Oh yeah, the Spanish War. Gabby Rosenstein was one of the youngest people to fight in the Spanish Civil War. When I started, because Guy was my teacher and was a figure, a real Pete Seeger. He wasn't a Pete Seeger wannabe, but he was a person who played a lot of the same kind of thing, with a beautiful voice, as Pete Seeger, and learned a lot from Pete. Guy is the person who arranged the song "We Shall Overcome" with Pete. Then Guy was with Johnny Apple Seed, actually. He went to all these meetings and taught "We Shall Overcome" to the Freedom Singers. They're the ones who made it. And other people.

Guy started the Ash Grove, the opening night, and about a year later, Miles Horton was the person who started the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, where Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks and so many others – it was started by him and a guy named Don West, a poet. He's the father of Hedy West, who's also a singer. His daughter was somebody that I was really close friends with. But that was later on.

So Highlander was always there, from the Depression on, and it was always the center for organizing workers in the South and also for mixing the races. So it always brought in people, it always was a target of the racists and segregationists, and so on and so forth. It was burnt down once and then relocated to where it is now in, I think, Knoxville, as opposed to Montego.

Anyway, so his wife Zilphia was the person who did the singing work and cultural work. And she died. So Miles asked Guy to come back East, and he did that and became the music director of the Highlander from '59 on. And then from then on he only showed up when – either when he was visiting his parents he'd play, or when he brought the Johns Island Singers, a traditional singing group from Johns Island, South Carolina.

Anyway, so then Guy was married at the time to a guy named Bill Oliver. He was a blacklisted writer for the *L.A. Herald Express*. So he was writing for *The Guardian*, but he was also a member of the Songmakers, which was the singing – originally started by Pete Seeger, whatever. So it had a lot of progressive people and party people, and so on. Because of that, and Bill wrote an article – the only time I've ever been covered in *The Guardian* was before the Ash Grove opened, by

Bill Oliver, because his son-in-law was opening at the Ash Grove, and so Bill wrote a big thing. Well, that's another story. But consider that in the fifteen, sixteen years of the Ash Grove's existence that the major progressive paper in the United States never covered the Ash Grove, not once.

VC: Really.

EP: Yeah, really. Not once. _____ two times, right at the beginning.

VC: What do you make of that?

EP: I won't go into it. I'm too angry about it.

VC: Okay.

EP: I mean, the people they covered don't exist, and they were meaningless, meaningless – I even asked Irwin Silber, who's a friend of mine, "How come you never covered the Ash Grove?" He was the editor of *The Guardian*. He had no answer. He didn't know why.

VC: Do you think it's like an East Coast/West Coast thing?

EP: Well, that had a little to do with it. But it's also – what I was doing was increasingly outside their purview. Just wasn't doing folk dances, and singing "We Shall Overcome." Actually, Martha Schlamme took up with Bernie _____, who has changed his name to Cheyenne _____, with a big cowboy hat. He opened his show with a bullhorn. This was during the day of Bull Conner. And he sang "We Shall Overcome" through the bullhorn. (laughs) And people were supposed to join in. That was his opening set. That was Martha's boyfriend. That's what I'm saying about _____. She was a trip, you know what I mean? Because Bernie – Cheyenne

was a total lunatic. There were black people in the audience. _____ ever got into it, because it was so ludicrous. That's really funny.

Anyway, so I had the imprimatur of *the* person on the West Coast who was going to be – whatever. And I was a very young generation, this is what they wanted. So when Kate and I went to Newport in 1959, the first Newport, I was introduced to Alan Lomax, Harold Leventhal, Manny Greenhill, Albert Grossman, every one of those people. And they all – Paul Endicott. I'd already known Pete, and Kate had met Manny. She was there studying with Martha Graham during the summer, then I joined her. Actually, she rode up to Boston in the car with Manny and his young find, Joan Baez, and the two women hated each other, because they were both beautiful and incredibly talented. And they hated each other. (laughs) Then I went up and met Kate in Boston, and then we went to Newport. So she introduced me to the Ramblers, who I would have met anyway. I'm just saying that's what happened.

Then all of these people started sending me their artists. The people I mentioned were the people who were the mockers of the folk song revival. They were the people who were the major – like Al Grossman with Bob Dylan, and Odetta, and a few other people. And Harold Leventhal with Pete Seeger, and Arlo Guthrie, and – I can't remember, but a number of others. The Terriers, which was also sophisticated. Two African Americans and one white guy. Eric Weissberg, the banjo player, did the song for *Deliverance*, in that movie. But Eric was really a fine – he's still playing. I read his name somewhere. And they were good players,

but they were not the real stuff. I got Arlo on his first trip out, and I got – just everyone. That was in the first period.

I remember one of the points of departure was what I told you about with Hershel Bernardi. The other one's with Harold Leventhal. Because the Terriers were starting to hit it big and going all over. So I wrote him a letter and asked him why didn't he – I had just started to get the real stuff, so I asked him why didn't he – you know, the Terriers should be taking along some traditional person. He wrote back whatever, he had somebody. I wrote back and said this is absolutely wrong, they're basically stealing the music from these people. They owe it. So when he came here, he came to me and said, "Nobody has ever spoken to me like that." He was totally insulted, totally insulted, that I dared – I was too young and – whatever.

I was not a business person. I never cared about business, I never will, I never did then. I cared enough to – I'm enough of a smart Jewish kid to know how to survive, and that's all I really cared about was surviving. And I was stupid, because I could have started a record company, I could have done a number of other things, but I just didn't think that way. So that's an unfortunate thing, because I had the world open to me at that point, in the early days. There was no industry, none, there wasn't any. Jac Holzman I met a little later on, but he hadn't even started yet. The guy who started Elektra Records.

Anyway, so I knew all these people early on, and they were basically business people with politics. That was it.

VC: Right. But they sound like they were a different generation of people as well.

EP: They were. It wasn't they who went down South and discovered people, except for Alan Lomax, who wasn't the same as them anyway. I mean, he had the Left politics, but he was a singular auteur, a great, great auteur. And he worked with the Library of Congress. He met Roosevelt and he worked with Annie Zarraga[?].

Alan gave me a real big compliment. We actually had a great talk at Newport. Five years later, he came out and he visited the Ash Grove. He said, "Ed, I'm really disappointed in you. I really thought you'd be going places." I said, "Alan, have you ever run a nightclub?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, then you know _____ all my time _____," or whatever. I mean, he was right, but he was also wrong. He put himself in a position where he could go off to Europe or –

VC: Right. Do whatever he wanted.

EP: Do whatever he wanted to. I mean, I'm a hometown boy anyway, but the complications of keeping the Ash Grove going for all those years really were demanding.

VC: Well, you know, too, I don't know how you would run a club successfully, like the Ash Grove, from afar. You would have to be at the club and in the community.

EP: No, no. Couldn't do that. Well, I mean, I did it a few times. I stayed away for a month and a half in '65, and I went on trips sometimes, but no more than a couple weeks.

VC: What's this right here? To go back to the ledger here. Where it says Temple ISR?

EP: Temple Israel.

VC: Is that the –

EP: It's a group. Look, it says a group, GR.

VC: Got it. So when the Spanish War vets played, was that a talk?

EP: No. That would be – the Spanish War vets had a party at the Ash Grove. If they're in this ledger with a head count, it has to do with them coming as a group to see the show. It wouldn't be in the ledger if it was just a meeting, unless we sold a bunch of food or something and I put it in. But then I wouldn't be taking any money.

VC: Right. Here where it says hoot and Stu, what's that?

EP: It's a hootenanny, with Stu – I forget his name. A good traditional singer.

VC: And it'd be a song swap with him kind of running it?

EP: Yeah.

VC: Interesting. Who are Ian and Sylvia?

EP: Oh, you never heard of them?

VC: No.

EP: They were extremely popular. They're from Canada. Ian Tyson and Silvia Fricker.

VC: No, never heard of them.

EP: They actually were very famous at that time. They really were. They were on the Hootenanny show and all this kind of thing. And they sang very well. They split up a long time ago, and Sylvia moved – I think Ian basically is a rancher, but he still performs in Canada, and he still performs Canadian rancher songs. He has a very nice voice. She's beautiful of course, and a lovely voice. And they sang things. They were a very attractive couple. It was like Richard and Mimi Farino. They were actually friends with them. It's the same sort of thing.

VC: And here Mance, that's Mance Lipscomb?

EP: Yeah.

VC: Is that the Georgia Sea Islanders?

EP: Yeah.

VC: Who were they?

EP: Bessie Jones and the Georgia Sea Island Singers. I sent you – well, that was one of the first things –

VC: Yeah, we talked about it.

EP: Bessie's sort of my sort of semi-mother. She stayed with us very regularly, whenever she came out. She first came out alone and then she came out with the rest of the singers. They're the closest thing to African music that you'd want to hear. And they use a lot of imagery. The vulture – not only the vulture, but also the overseer, and the kinds of dances they did, and references in their songs, and whatnot, were references from their lives, from their people's culture and lives. The thing is, is that they're all devout Christians, but they have Africanized icons and traditions in their music.

VC: So, does this mean there was a two-week stint, where they would start here on the eleventh of June and then just run straight into the –

EP: If that's what it says, yeah.

VC: So they would do the acts every night.

EP: Yeah.

VC: Wow. This is amazing that you kept this.

EP: Well, yeah, it was a ledger book, and so I kept it in one drawer.

VC: And here's Beverly Hills Sane?

EP: Mm-hmm.

VC: They just came as a group?

EP: That's for Sane Nuclear Policy. Yeah, there was a lot of peace groups and – you should have seen the first five years, we were really loaded with them, with those groups.

VC: They liked the –

EP: They liked the Ash Grove. I mean, the Ash Grove opened and it was a place big enough for people to meet. It wasn't just a commercial, you know, coffee house like the Unicorn, which was the first one. It was always crowded. I had a performance room and then I had a front room. And also, I was open and interested in having them. I mean, I was told by Harry Hay himself that the Ash Grove, from day one – he was there opening night, which I didn't know him until many years later – was one of the few places that gay men could feel comfortable.

VC: I think you mentioned that to me, that the Mattachine Society met there?

EP: Well, Harry started the Mattachine Society. He was one of the two founders.

VC: Interesting.

EP: Yeah. And I was unaware of any of this, because I didn't have the prejudices. I mean, nobody ever said – I don't think you'd find the Mattachine Society _____ as a group, but, I don't know, there they were. They felt good. There was a welcoming feeling about the Ash Grove, so all kinds of people would come. As long as you didn't hate anybody there, you were welcome to stay. I never really had an incident where people hated other people there.

VC: What's CORE?

EP: Congress of Racial Equality. You've never heard of CORE?

VC: I've heard of them. I just wanted to make sure.

EP: What were they there for?

VC: It says group. They were there to see Jack Elliott and the Freedom Singers.

EP: Oh, the Freedom Singers, sure. (laughs) That'll make more sense. But what's interesting is, I put on Jack Elliott with the Freedom Singers. I did all of that stiff. Look who the Freedom Singers played with, on there. They were there six weeks in a row.

VC: Jackie O'Shannon? Is that right?

EP: Jackie Deshannon. She's a pop singer.

VC: Haskell's Rascals?

EP: That's a children's – it's a ranch in the Valley, and Oliver Haskell had horses and things like that, and had a summer camp and all that.

VC: And here's Cheyenne.

EP: Great.

VC: That must have gone over well.

EP: Oh, definitely.

VC: Here he is again, and there's a CORE all week. What's the Militant – the group?

EP: The Militant would be the Militant – where is the Militant? That's midnight. Oh, yeah, midnight. Sailor at midnight. Somebody named Sailor. Don't ask me. Oh, the Militant was a group, yeah. I see. Yeah, the Militant would be the Militant newspaper of the Socialist Workers Party.

VC: Is this when you were hanging out with them?

EP: No. No, I never hung out with that. The one group I had was the International Socialists.

VC: Oh, sorry. I'm still –

EP: Well, what happened is that – no, I never hung out with – knowingly – I mean, I never went to a Communist Party meeting or a Militant meeting in my life. I went to the People's World – because Kate wanted to go to the People's World banquet because she wanted to hear Dorothy Healy, so we went there. And we were – this was like 1968, which would mean I was already thirty-one, or something like that, and basically we sat at the youngsters' table. (both laugh) I'm not kidding. And we got so much food. There was this nice little Jewish lady giving us knishes and things. They knew how to put on a party. It was great. Dorothy was great. She didn't ask the Communist Party. (laughs) _____ people who were yelling at her.

VC: Oh, yeah, in '68, right.

EP: It was her denouement.

VC: Right. That's when she was probably fed up and getting ready to go.

EP: Well, yeah. Then she left after that. Then they expelled her after that, which meant nobody could talk with her. But she was the head of the party then. She was. She gave a serious critique of when Khrushchev, I guess, exposed the crimes of the Soviet Union, of Stalin, Stalin's crimes, in 1956.

VC: Maybe in '51?

EP: No.

VC: Fifty-six.

EP: No, maybe '60, '65.

VC: I should know all this too.

EP: Yeah, I should too. But in any event, it was – it had to be in the sixties, '65. Khrushchev was premier only starting about 1960, same time John Kennedy came in. I think. But he would not have been in a position to do anything like that until towards the end of his term, and I think it was '65. So this is three years later.

VC: Right. I mean, she could have been there denouncing them for – I mean, the '68, you know –

EP: Well, she said that she didn't know, and people asked her how come you didn't know, and she said, "We blended ourselves, basically." They refused to believe anything, until it was exposed by one of their own. That's what happens. Look what's happening in Iran, it's very interesting. I'm just saying one aspect of it, just for right now, because Mousavi, the guy that just lost, is actually, in a way, sort of a titular leader of a movement that he didn't create, and that is changing him by the day. Now he's ready to be a martyr and he's accepting their demands. I mean, assuming that he means it all. You know what I mean?

VC: Right.

EP: But like he really didn't start there. He really comes from _____ class of the elite.

VC: Yeah, it's one of the biggest ironies ever, because he's no more a revolutionary leader than Ahmadinejad.

EP: I know. Except now it's a civil rights movement. So you can change. You know what I mean? I mean, that's what it is, basically it really is a movement for civil rights and democracy.

VC: Yeah. I'm a little worried. I don't think it'll –

EP: You can never go home there.

VC: No.

EP: I was saying *you* could never go home there. That was a joke.

VC: Right, right. I got it. What's this where it says WISP?

EP: WISP is a women's organization, Women for Peace. It's one of the peace groups. It's an acronym but I can't remember. International Society for Peace or something. It was something like that. It was a bourgeois group.

VC: How would those groups come?

EP: My sister – well, for one thing, when somebody who is Jewish came with a Hadassah group, she happens to belong to WISP, so that's how WISP knows, who happens to belong to the Girl Scouts. Who knows? I mean, it accumulates. I can't tell you the specifics, but that's what happened.

VC: And then they would come as a group and –

EP: Yeah. They would know that – we want to have a group with about thirty, and we'd say, okay, we'll save seating. You can have this if you get over twenty people, or something like that. And we made easy terms. Just let us know a couple of days early, we'll save all the seats.

VC: And then here's Barbara Dane?

EP: Yeah.

VC: She was there. So she was there for two weeks here?

EP: Mm-hmm. Within the first week she drew three nineteen on Saturday, then she went to four _____.

VC: What's this where it says Joan Baez, Hollywood Bowl?

EP: Oh, well, that was – oh, yeah. That was one of my great nights. I would produce – I had a huge attendance at the Ash Grove, but then I also set the record for attendance at the Hollywood Bowl with Joan Baez.

VC: So that was going on while –

EP: And introducing to the West Coast, for his first appearance, the kid that was supposed to play at the Ash Grove about a year earlier. Bob Dylan opened for her. That's when they were going together. But nobody knew him, or at least a lot of people didn't know him and actually had complaints about how he – this one guy wrote this letter saying how could you allow this angel to be besmirched by – and this guy had _____, he had like five last names. It was really funny. It was hilarious. And I remember my friend and my lawyer, Steven Reinhart, now near retirement, appeals court judge, anyway, Steven and I composed this letter to Mr. _____, or whatever his name was. I saw Steven a few years ago and asked him did he ever keep a copy of that, and he didn't either. It was so hilarious, his letter of outrage.

VC: I'll bet. People had that reaction to Joan Baez.

EP: Well, no, no, no. He was outraged about –

VC: No, but like they would –

EP: Oh, yeah, they idolized her.

VC: Yeah, and then couldn't quite understand –

EP: How she could be with us. Because she was a great singer. I mean, she liked classical music.

VC: Yeah. My dad, who loves classical music mostly, loves Joan Baez. Doesn't go much further than Joan Baez.

EP: Well, he should play _____.

VC: Right, he should. What's this Neo-Renaissance? That shows up a lot.

EP: The Neo-Renaissance Players. Yeah. That was a group of musicians. What day of the week was that, Monday?

VC: Yeah.

EP: Yeah. That was a group of musicians – I'll remember the name in a second – that played traditional Elizabethan instruments.

VC: Oh, no kidding!

EP: Yeah.

VC: Wow. That must have been fascinating.

EP: Yeah. I mean, very old harmoniums and lutes and things like that.

VC: And then there's – what's this where it says Lightnin' and Rene, Hugh, Sandy, Long Gone?

EP: Oh, that's Lightning Hopkins. The Bolshoi Ballet came – forty members of the Bolshoi Ballet were our guests. It was at the Hollywood Bowl, yeah. Rita _____ has some good stories about that night, she says. Talking about half of them were drunk, and who made out with who. Anyway, so I put on a special show. Lightning Hopkins, Rene _____, a wonderful, spectacular Flamenco player, younger than me. He was like a genius. Hugh Romney is Wavy Gravy. And Sandy Bull was – do you know Sandy Bull?

VC: No.

EP: He was a great guitarist. He died not so long ago. But he was like John Fahey, but much more together at that point in his life. But an absolutely great instrumentalist, like Frank Hamilton or somebody like that. You don't know who that is either, probably.

VC: No. I know who John Fahey is.

EP: Yeah. And _____ Miles, who's Lightening's protégé, so probably Bernie played with him.

VC: So that was a two week –

EP: That was a special show.

VC: So they were doing it for three weeks here? From – what does it say? the twenty-first of October?

EP: Oh, no. Oh, my God.

VC: So just that week and that week and then –

EP: Oh. I don't know how that – I really don't get it. Where Long Gone just sang with Lightning. Yeah, I have no idea how I could put all those people together, but I did. I really don't know.

VC: It looks like a good show.

EP: Well, I mean, but it's such a – how I got them all on stage. Well, that really is odd. Well, I was feeling confident with the Joan Baez and Bob Dylan thing. And Barbara Dane at the same time. Drawing the same _____, four hundred and thirty-eight paid.

VC: Right. I might have gone to the Barbara Dane show myself.

EP: Yeah. Well, obviously a lot of people did.

VC: How many could the Ash Grove hold?

EP: Well, theoretically, two – we stuffed in – I think one time we drew over five hundred with Odetta.

VC: And that was about maximum?

EP: No, no, no, no, no. That would be like two or three shows on the same night. That's total. No, the Ash Grove could hold, at the most, safely, two hundred and twenty-five.

VC: So that was two shows that night?

EP: Yeah, right. And they were both full, so you can see how many people snuck in and got in for nothing. When I stopped drinking in 1984, I went to a couple of AA meetings, and the first AA meeting I went to, in Venice, where I was living at the time, was – you know, they take a recess during the meeting, after people are confessing and doing all that kind of stuff. And you have coffee and then some cake or something. No more than five or six people came up to me and greeted me and told me that they had gone to the Ash Grove, and without exception, each one said they took their first drink there. And they got in for nothing. Now, I don't know how much – but I'm telling you, that was the story. In other words, we were really soft touches for the kids. Not to mention wine. You got a glass of wine. We never sold hard liquor there.

VC: That's a legacy. This is fascinating. I'm glad they took pictures. Wow. And here's President Kennedy getting assassinated right there.

EP: Oh, yeah. It was horrible. I was gone. I was gone from here. Tom Paxton. I miss Tom. And I got back – Kennedy was shot the day I got back, November 22nd. It is November 22nd, right?

VC: Yep.

EP: I got back that day, I came back to the Ash Grove, I went in and sat down, and an hour later the guy from the gas station next door came in and said that Kennedy had just been shot. So I turned on the radio. It was a complete shock, total shock.

And then started the phone calls with all the nightclub owners wondering what I was doing. They're such cowards. They wanted to see if I'd close or not. If I wasn't going to close, they weren't going to close. They didn't know how to act when something serious happened, so they called me. I mean, people I never knew. Seriously, they were calling and asking whether the Ash Grove was going to close.

VC: Unbelievable. And here's Bill Monroe coming back again, and Doc Watson.

EP: Oh, good.

VC: What's this Roger Clemens consort?

EP: Oh, that's Robert Clemens. That was another Elizabethan consort, a group that played pre-classical music, before Bach ruined it.

VC: Wow. Here's _____ White.

EP: Yeah. He was around a lot. Used to be.

VC: What are McCabe's Jelly Rollers?

EP: That was a group of people – McCabe's a guitarist, right?

VC: Right.

EP: It didn't start doing music until the Ash Grove closed in '73, about the same time. They actually had come to me to tell me they were planning on doing this before I closed, but I already realized the Ash Grove was on the way out, before the last fire. But they actually started doing that after that. Before then, for a while, they opened an annex in the Ash Grove for guitars and records and things like that.

VC: Like a little shop?

EP: Yeah. Right in the front part of it. And when the Ash Grove was forty-four foot wide and a hundred foot long, so in the like twenty foot and then there'd be eight foot doors, whatever. So on that side, the northwest side, they had a space maybe – I'd say no bigger than the width of this room, so they had instruments and records on this side and _____ on that side. So the McCabe Jerry Rollers probably were kids that hang around. So then a lot of kids that wanted to just play instruments, whether the show was on or not. I mean, they were there, they just like each other, and they like to talk about records, and we did this, and look at stuff, and buying things, whatever. They hung out there. So it probably was the kids that were hanging out there had a group, so I put them on.

VC: Cool. That was nice of you.

EP: Well, I did a lot of that stuff. For years – you know, I helped start the Topanga Canyon Banjo and Fiddle Contest.

VC: Oh really. I keep meaning to go to that every year.

EP: Well, it's a long way. It started off in Topanga, of course. So for years, the winners of the contest – the grand prize would be to play the Ash Grove. So they would

play. They'd get a little money. And they'd play with the New Lost City Ramblers or somebody like that. They'd be on for a weekend.

VC: Cool. Here are the Kentucky Colonels and Buffy Saint Marie?

EP: Uh-huh.

VC: Did they play together?

EP: On the same show? There it is.

VC: But it wasn't like the two of them playing. It was a double bill.

EP: Well, Clarence and Buffy played together, but other than that –

VC: Oh, right. Here are the _____ Teens, is a group?

EP: No, that would be a group. Oh, yeah. _____ Teens. Yeah, it's all teenagers.

VC: What's this? The _____?

EP: _____, an Israeli singer, good singer.

VC: It seems like the Jewish community was really there a lot.

EP: Well, yeah. I mean, were people specifically interested in Israeli music? Yes. Less and less as time went by, after I made the concrete change _____ primarily. It still was broad. It was less restricted than what I thought, actually. But with a heavy emphasis on – but by that time, people like Bill and Doc were already big draws, so it was –

VC: Right. Now, is that Reverend Gary Davis, right there?

EP: Yeah, Gary Davis. Yeah, Lloyd is Bert Lloyd. This is right before the second UCLA Folk Festival. That's why A.L. Lloyd would be in town. He only played once. And the Watson family. So the Reverend Gary Davis – so this is really two great guitarists, Reverend Gary Davis and Doc Watson. The only different thing,

Bert Lloyd is from Wales and a great traditional singer, a really wonderful person. I really liked him very, very much.

VC: Yeah, and here's Festival Week?

EP: Yeah.

VC: And that's Ry Cooder?

EP: Yeah.

VC: David and –

EP: David _____ and Bernie, my brother. Bernard, that's his name.

VC: Plus many guests.

EP: Yeah.

VC: That must have been a party.

EP: Yeah.

VC: Who's Steve Brainard?

EP: He was a folk singer of some sort. I can't remember.

VC: What would this be right here, where it says –

EP: Gail _____.

VC: Who's that?

EP: Gail _____? I told you about her. The Israeli. And _____ is a French mime. This is the Cal Tech group.

VC: Then Lightnin'. How old were your brother and – you know, when he and Ry Cooder would be playing? Would they be – this is what? '63? Maybe '64?

EP: Twenty. Maybe twenty-one, something like that.

VC: Would the people who would be coming to see these shows, was it still multigenerational?

EP: Yeah.

VC: Or was it mostly kids?

EP: No. A lot of the initial audience were ten years older at that point, at least as far as – like a lot of people significantly older than I was, so there always were – it was always multi everything, always.

VC: Is that Mississippi John Hurt?

EP: Probably. Yeah, John Hurt. Dry City Scat Bank. That's Richard Greene and David Lindley and a couple of others. I can't remember who.

VC: Here's the Chambers Brothers.

EP: Mm-hmm. Richard Chase was a storyteller. Who's he on with? Oh, the Stoneman Family. Oh, great.

VC: Who are they?

EP: Oh, God. Ike Stoneman, the father, was a great singer. He sang on the same level as like the person that Doc Watson came with, Tom Ashley, Clarence Ashley. Ike Stoneman was one of those people that made records in the twenties and thirties, that I'd heard. Really outstanding showman and banjo player. Anyway, his children, the first one being Scotty, is the best fiddler I've ever heard in my life. Not only that, I mean, everyone would say the same thing. He's an absolute genius, a real – well, after that show, Scotty stayed behind because the group fired him because he was drunk all the time.

VC: Oh, I think you told me about this guy.

EP: Yeah, right.

VC: You caught him eating a jar of mayo?

EP: Yeah. He could play lying on his back. Flat on his back, drunk as a skunk, he could play the fiddle better than anybody else standing up, whatever. Doing summersaults, anything. And he wound up doing a record, thank God, with the Kentucky Colonels that was just superb. What a player, and a real wonderful match for Clarence. Just a great, great – and one of the daughters, Ronnie, was like Minnie Pearl except on *Hee Haw*. She was the Minnie Pearl on *Hee Haw*, the country bumpkin. Very funny and could make her face go in all kinds of expressions and say stupid cornball things deliberately, perfect timing. And Donna, the mandolin player, was just the perfect angelic blonde and lovely singer, and she was the front person.

And they really could play great music, just great music. They'd bring out their father, who would play the fiddle or play the banjo or play something like a harmonium or something like that. And he'd sit down and he'd sing some old songs, tell us a story or two. They were all there for the Festival. And then Scotty stayed on. He died of cancer, I think, maybe after four years later than that. He just could not stop drinking, just couldn't.

VC: It's a disease.

EP: Yeah. Such a talent, such a great talent.

VC: Would this be Guy Carawan, where it says Guy C?

EP: Yeah, of course. And Betty Fikes of the Freedom Singers, and the Dry City Scat Band, the children's show. He was visiting his parents.

VC: Is this Ian and Sylvia here?

EP: Oh, yeah, good. Along with _____. Do you know who that is?

VC: No.

EP: Look how much they drew.

VC: Oh, my God.

EP: Ian and Sylvia, like I said, they were extremely popular. They're hitting all the drunks. _____ is a legendary, truly legendary Irish accordion player – or ilian pipes. He was a great singer and storyteller, truly a – like Brendan Behan, or any of the great Irish poets. But he was a folk – he was a musician. I mean, he is a legend in Ireland. He hung around for quite a time. I knew him personally. I mean, I liked him personally. We got along very well, and he really liked the Ash Grove and me and everything.

VC: Yeah, they drew quite a crowd, two weeks in a row.

EP: Yeah.

VC: Here, where it says Yom Kippur, that was Yom Kippur that night?

EP: Yeah. So we only drew a hundred and ninety-four people. (laughs)

VC: Right. Who's Betty Fikes?

EP: Betty was the youngest member of the Freedom Singers for quite a while. She stayed in Los Angeles and located here. The Chambers Brothers and Long Gone. Long Gone would be playing with Bernie when Lightning wasn't here. Only Bernie could play with Long Gone. Long Gone was used to Lightning. He was Lightning's protégé, a singer, really good singer. Also a drunk. And Bernie played

with Betty. Oh, this says with David, so that would be David – David ____ playing with Betty. What's that say?

VC: S. Hinton.

EP: Oh, Sam Hinton.

VC: Who's Sam Hinton? He's a storyteller, right?

EP: Yeah, and children's singer. He can play a harmonica without sticking it in his mouth. He'd just play it.

VC: I think I had a Sam Hinton record as a kid. Someone got it for me.

EP: Yeah.

VC: And then the Freedom Singers here again? With SNIC?

EP: That's a different Freedom Singers. What year is that?

VC: Must be '64?

EP: Oh, '64, yeah, that would be the Freedom Singers, but there's something – Freedom Singers, Steve Brainard, yeah. No, this is the second – Freedom Singers II, so there were – with Matthew – I forget his name. Anyway, this is the second version of the Freedom Singers. This is not '64 or '63. This is like '65, I think.

VC: Okay. That's possible. I was looking for years.

EP: Oh, so it *was* '64. Okay. So one year afterwards.

VC: Did other places book the Freedom Singers?

EP: No. What I did is – like I told you, my friendship with Steven Reinhart, so Steven and Mary, they arranged for a number of cocktail parties that were their kind of people, rich people, you know, Democratic Party, liberal. But he knew the Black League and all of those kind of people, in their own homes. Like in New Orleans,

when I was down there as a member of the Free Southern Theater, we were invited to a home – it was a mansion, a literal mansion, with very light-skinned people, and there were black servants and all of that, much darker. In New Orleans. So they arranged a number of private gatherings for people. The Freedom Singers made a lot of money.

VC: I bet. And if you wanted to go see them in L.A., you would go to the Ash Grove.

EP: They were there for four weeks the first time, or six weeks, and the second time for two weeks. But it was a different group. The first time, it was really a spectacular kind of thing.

VC: The second time, people had already –

EP: Well, no. I mean, whatever it was, it was just – the first time they came, here was the deal. I get a call from Toshi Seeger saying, "There's this great group." So Pete would do a concert, put on a good concert and then afterwards the Freedom Singers would come to the Ash Grove. So I introduced them in a major concert with Pete, for which Pete refused to charge me. He's done this several times. He just didn't like to take money. First of all, he likes money as much as I do, which is not very much. It's Toshi who handles all the finance and all of it in this deal. So I put him on. We gave the Freedom Singers a good amount of money. Pete didn't take a thing.

And then they came to the Ash Grove, where they had a decent guarantee and made more than that. Basically, then I arranged for all these parties. I mean, that is, I asked Steven – and I think there was one or two other people also that knew other people. So it all worked out very well. That first time was a major

thing that Pete – the publicity – first of all, he got an audience for them by putting them on the show with him, and then they opened the next week at the Ash Grove. A lot of people liked them, because they're great. Bernice Reagon. You didn't go to the Ash Grove Festival?

VC: No. I wasn't in L.A. at that point. No. I'm sorry I didn't.

EP: Yeah. That's really too bad.

VC: Yeah, I think so. What's this NLCR?

EP: New Lost City Ramblers.

VC: And then Mance Lipscomb playing a week here?

EP: Yeah. Did that thing click off?

VC: No. It's still going.

EP: You know it's twelve-fifteen.

VC: We should wrap it up. Oh, here, this is the end of '64. So this was sort of one of the – like the high points of the Ash Grove?

EP: What?

VC: Around the end of '64? Like from '62 through –

EP: I would say that '64, '65 concluded a chapter in the Ash Grove of traditional music, great acoustic traditional music. And the Freedom Singers, by being who they were, by being great traditional singers, by being the singing spokespeople for a progressive movement, by being part of the group seeking freedom itself, and being the singing part, and writing the songs, and so on, and representing them and being the same age as the people that they were singing to, were one of the great highlights of the Ash Grove.

VC: Really.

EP: Of course. Yes. Who else could say that? What other group were being put in jail, and sitting in, and being part of a freedom singer that are born and bred in the church, knew how to sing, were part of the community, and were great organizers. And wrote the songs, and sang them, and were raising the money. They were the cultural vanguard of that movement. And also, they politicized people. It was the same thing that happened when the Teatro Campesino came years later, where they were the – acting with Luis Valdez and Danny Valdez. It was before the Zoot Suit or anything like that. And they also affected people in that same way. I mean, that's the glory of traditional music, of people steeped in that who didn't change the music and weren't singing on behalf of other people. They were singing for their own people. But singing actually – deeply connecting with many people spiritually and aesthetically and politically, and so on. They opened up the door for all kinds of things. So those engagements of the Freedom Singers were just seminal.

But also, it so happened that the Beatles showed up in '64, '65, and the world changed, and we began – I would say '65. But basically, it's a good time to – it's okay to end right there. Because '65 was the beginning of the transition. It was a whole other era.

VC: Good. I think that is a good place to stop then. Just for the record, it is the 27th of June, 2009. I'm here talking with Ed Pearl.

[end]